



## US-CHINA Rivalry and Press Freedom in the Indo-Pacific Region: A Critical Analysis of Sino-US Media

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**Abstract:** *In the ongoing power struggle between China and the US, the press plays an important role in shaping narratives on both sides. However, media coverage in the Indo-Pacific is influenced by a number of variables. The research intends to give insights into the relationship between rivalry and media freedom by analyzing the nature of press coverage, prevalent narratives, biases, and obstacles encountered by journalists. The purpose of this research is to examine how media outlets on both sides disseminate their respective governments' Indo-Pacific agendas. It adds to a deeper understanding of the complicated link between the US-China competition and press freedom in the Indo-Pacific region, emphasizing the importance of media independence as well as the necessity for openness and open discussion in order to build a dynamic and informed public conversation in the area.*

**Key Words:** US-China, Indo-Pacific, Press Freedom, Geopolitics, Comparative Analysis

### Introduction

The competition between the United States and China has evolved as a defining aspect of world geopolitics, with far-reaching repercussions for the Indo-Pacific area. One of the most crucial geopolitical trends of our day is competition. As these two countries vie for influence and power in other parts of the world, the future of the region's free press becomes more questionable. Both countries' media landscapes are significantly different, with the Chinese Communist Party having strict control over the press and the United States enjoying a freer and more open media environment. However, recent developments in both nations indicate that the future of the free press is at risk, with substantial consequences for the US-China competition. This research will look at the situation of the press's autonomy in the United States and

China, the issues facing media organizations in both nations and the possible ramifications of press freedom degradation for the region as a whole. It will argue that the prospects of a free press in the area are questionable, which might have far-reaching consequences for the US-China competition in the future. The United States has long taken pleasure in its independent and free press, which is guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. This has resulted in a broad and lively media landscape, with a vast spectrum of news outlets and points of view. However, confidence in the media has declined in recent years, owing in part to the emergence of social media and the dissemination of misinformation. However, the persistent issues confronting media outlets in the United States, such as diminishing trust and the spread of misinformation, imply that the

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country's free press is far from safe. In China, though, the media scene is dramatically different. The Chinese Communist Party tightly controls the media. State-run media sources, such as the Xinhua News Agency and the People's Daily, dominate the country's media and are entrusted with propagating the party's ideology and furthering its interests. While some private media channels exist in China, they are subject to severe controls and are frequently obliged to self-censor in order to avoid falling foul of the government.

The deterioration of journalistic freedom in both nations might have ramifications for the rest of the region, especially as the US and China vie for influence and power. The competition between the United States and China is complicated and varied, having economic, military, and ideological components. For decades, the two nations have been involved in a strategic struggle, each attempting to mould the global system in its own image. The media plays an important part in this competition since it may form public opinion and alter impressions of the opposing side. The future of the region's free press is questionable, with both the United States and China facing severe obstacles. As the two nations continue to vie for power and influence, it is vital that the mass media in both countries maintain their independence and freedom, allowing them to report on events and hold those in authority accountable.

## Literature Review

Press freedom has been guaranteed by the First Amendment in the United States for a very long time. Scholars, on the contrary, have investigated a variety of factors that may impact the country's press freedom. According to Machesney and Nichols (2010), monopolistic media ownership and economic pressures have led to a narrowing of opinions and a decline in variety in the US media landscape. Their investigation shows that corporate aims have a significant influence on coverage, and journalists may be able to self-censor. Wasserman and Madrid-Morales (2019) analyze the tensions between issues of national security and media freedom in the United States. They investigate how government surveillance and restrictions on journalists' access to information, particularly on national

security concerns may limit journalistic freedom. Concerns about the quality and validity of US media content have grown in response to the rise of "fake news" and misinformation (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). In contrast, China has a strictly regulated media ecosystem with limited press freedom. Scholars have looked into the intricate relationship between the Chinese state and the news industry, discovering pervasive censorship and official control over information. Zhao (2008) focuses on "media control" in China, namely the Communist Party's control over press organizations, news content and journalistic activities. The research by Zhou and Gao (2019) explores the impact of technological advancements and internet limitations on journalistic freedom in China. They look at how the Great Firewall, surveillance mechanisms, and content screening affect information access and freedom of speech. Scholars have also examined the challenges encountered by freelancers and fellow citizen reporters around China, who are regularly harassed, followed, and even imprisoned for what they report (Qiao et al., 2018). Harwit and Clark (2018) explore media ownership structures in the two countries, highlighting the differences between the more centralized and commercialized media environment in the United States provided by the government media system in China. They look at how conflicting media systems affect free expression and journalistic practices. Chitty and Lauer (2019) investigate the difficulties raised by global media corporations, as well as the opportunity for commercial interests to affect the dissemination of news and limit press freedom. They also examine the activities of international organizations such as Reporters Without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists, which monitor and struggle for press freedom across the globe.

## Methodology

A qualitative approach with comparative analysis has been used for the current investigation. MokhtarianPour (2016) defines comparative research as the process of analyzing and comparing events to discover points of differentiation and likeness. A comparative perspective identifies

weaknesses in study design and supports researchers in enhancing research quality. Comparative research looks at both differences and similarities between units (Holt & Turner, 1970). The act of documenting and comprehending similarities and differences in situations or results across broad-scale social systems such as regions, nations, communities, and cultures is known as comparative analysis. Cross-cultural analysis, sociology cross-societal analysis, political science cross-national analysis, comparative historical analysis, and psychological evaluation are all anthropological traditions (Smelser, 1973). Additionally, Teun van Dijk's (1989) Socio-Cognitive Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis is applied in this research study.

### Research Objectives

1. To assess the current state of press freedom in the Indo-Pacific region, taking into account the influence of the US-China rivalry.
2. To identify the challenges faced by journalists and media organizations in upholding press freedom.
3. To evaluate the nature of reporting by media outlets on both sides.

### Critical Discourse Analysis

Theo van Leeuwen, Gunther Kress, Teun van Dijk, and Norman Fairclough pioneered Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter CDA) in the early 1990s (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). To separate this paradigm from prior Discourse Analysis theories and techniques, CDA theories and methods were created at the time. The phrase was later known by various other names. While some scholars use the name Critical Linguistics (CL) to designate their fields of study, others use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDS). As a result, CDA is an integrative approach that, in accordance with Bloor and Bloor (2007), can be used by experts from a variety of professions. CDA is defined as the study of the abuse of societal authority, inequality, and dominance in social institutions and organizations, along with how power and ideology are used in the text. People's thinking may be controlled by the institution or organization that dominates the

conversation. As a result, CDA aims to address the issue of who dominates the conversation and how it impacts the behaviour of those with fewer resources. According to Fairclough (2001), CDA explains how language is used as a tool of power to promote inequality in society, as well as in the domination and exploitation of some persons by others. The CDA addresses a variety of issues, the most significant of which are racism, gender, sexism, and media depiction.

### Press freedom in the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific area has a diversified press freedom condition, with substantial differences between countries. While some nations have relatively good protections for press freedom, others suffer major obstacles and constraints. It is critical to investigate the varied circumstances and situations that impact press freedom in various sections of the region:

1. **Australia:** Australia has a long legacy of independent journalism and media independence, which contributes to the country's robust press freedom environment. Concerns have been made, however, about national security regulations that may limit journalistic freedom and whistleblowers.
2. **Japan:** With autonomous news organizations and active journalism, the country enjoys a reasonably good level of press freedom. However, there are also worries regarding self-control and restricted entry to information, particularly when it comes to government actions.
3. **South Korea:** South Korea's media ecosystem is robust and diversified, although media ownership dominance remains an issue. Furthermore, there are numerous instances of legal lawsuits and threats directed against journalists, raising worries about press freedom.
4. **Southeast Asia:** Press freedom varies greatly throughout Southeast Asian countries. While some nations, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, have comparatively open press environments, other nations, such as Myanmar, Cambodia, and Vietnam, have

severe obstacles, such as government control, censorship, and journalist harassment.

5. **China:** China has one of the region's most restricted media environments, with extensive official control and censorship. To silence alternative voices and control the media narrative, the Chinese government deploys sophisticated monitoring technologies, internet restrictions, and massive regulation.
6. **Hong Kong:** The adoption of the National Security Law has resulted in considerable degradation of journalistic freedom in Hong Kong in recent years. Journalists confront rising dangers, and news organizations have faced reporting limitations, leading to self-censorship and a dampening impact on press freedom.
7. **Myanmar:** Myanmar's press freedom has suffered substantial blows in recent years, notably since the military takeover in 2021. Threats, arrests, and censorship significantly impede journalists' capacity to report independently.
8. **Pacific Island Countries:** Press freedom varies among Pacific Island countries, with some governments fostering media independence while others confront issues due to low resources, political meddling, and restrictive legislation.

### **Impact of US-CHINA Rivalry on Press Freedom in the Indo-Pacific**

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The competition between the United States and China has a substantial influence on freedom of speech in the Indo-Pacific area, altering the press landscape and journalists' capacity to operate freely. The rivalry between the two powers to form media narratives and affect public opinion has had a significant impact. Both the United States and China use a variety of instruments to push their interests and viewpoints, including state-owned media outlets, social networking platforms, and research campaigns. This can pose difficulties for independent journalism since media outlets may ally with one power or feel forced to produce biased news. China's approach,

characterized by government censorship, internet limitations, and governmental control over media outlets, has the potential to chill press freedom in Indo-Pacific countries. China's practices use similar methods to limit media freedom, silence dissident voices, and regulate the dissemination of information. Journalists and media organizations are also subjected to heightened monitoring and harassment as a result of the rivalry. Governments may step up attempts to observe journalists' activities, get access to their communications, and penalize those who cover sensitive topics. Surveillance and harassment can have a significant influence on media freedom, leading to self-censorship and reducing journalists' willingness to write on delicate or contentious themes.

Furthermore, the US-China rivalry may result in the passage of legislation and regulations affecting media freedom. Legislation may be introduced or strengthened by governments to combat misinformation, safeguard national security, or regulate internet platforms. However, similar regulations can be used to limit journalistic freedom, stifle dissent, or muzzle critical voices. Journalists working in the region may encounter legal and regulatory obstacles, limiting their capacity to express their opinions without interference and holding governments responsible. Tensions between the United States and China may make international reporting in the Indo-Pacific area more difficult. As governments strive to control their narrative and prevent foreign news that may be viewed as unfavourable or critical, journalists may face greater scrutiny, visa restrictions, and even deportation from nations. The competition between the United States and China has ramifications for regional collaboration on media freedom problems. Some nations may choose to identify with one of the powers, pursuing policies that prioritize geopolitical objectives above journalistic freedom. This can stymie regional attempts to fight for and safeguard press freedom.

### **Analysis of US and Chinese Media**

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To compare Chinese and American journalistic practices, we must first understand each nation's journalistic traditions and media frameworks. While the media system in the

United States is usually seen as a libertarian model, the Chinese press is viewed as a close approach to the Soviet communist model (Joseph, 2005). Comparing media systems, on the other hand, demands a more complex methodology, as Hallin and Mancini (2004) pointed out. Although the origins of American journalism could be dated back to the 17th century, the modern concepts of neutral and unbiased journalism did not arise until the beginning of the twentieth century (McChesney, 2003). In the words of Kaplan (2003), the World Wars established a feeling of national identity, which set the framework for many modern American journalistic practices. He maintained that in the climate of war journalism, partisanship was never totally replaced by objectivity; rather, the focus shifted from within the country to "the president's actions in confrontation with our national enemies." (p. 215). This was made possible by the media ownership structure in the United States, which was mostly profit-driven and mainly concentrated on sensationalism (McChesney, 2003). China is not exactly the same as it once was when the Communist Party controlled and subsidized the news media and residents had no other method to learn about outside influences. Journalists from China are routinely acquainted with Western journalistic practices and information, and many have taken part in conferences and acquired degrees from Western countries or professors who received Western media training. The media's portrayal of the US-China competition in the Indo-Pacific area is highly influenced by each nation's domestic priorities and cultural preferences. Chang, Wang, and Chen (1998) agreed that the Chinese media covered several

events in the United States more thoroughly than the American media. China's image in the United States has worsened after the fall of the Soviet Union (Peng, 2004; Shambaugh, 2003; Xu, 2018; Yang & Liu, 2012).

### **Key Findings and Conclusion**

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The United States of America and China are the two primary drivers of the Indo-Pacific power balance. Both sides have a robust media network that covers events in the area and throughout the world for their national interests. The majority of American media is of a mixed character. It has both public and private partnerships. However, after investigating the US's Indo-Pacific policy and the content of its media reporting, it is clear that Washington, as well as along with other Western governments, uses its press and think tanks to depict Beijing as a draconian regime in the area. Furthermore, US-based media agencies have publicized human rights breaches and other internal Chinese issues as a means of swaying ASEAN governments to China's side. For the sake of national security and global hegemony, US media outlets are continually propagandizing their state narrative. This demonstrates the myth that freedom of speech in the United States is tightening over time. Chinese media, on the other hand, is recognized for its steadfast adherence to communist themes. Beijing's state-controlled media portrays US actions and intervention in Indo-Pacific matters as a danger to the stability and peace of the region. However, it presents the bulk of the water channels in the region as Chinese land, making the situation in the region more complex.

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